



Territorial Observation and Cross-Border Cooperation: the Challenges for Research

CESCI Territorial Observation Conference,
Budapest, 30 September 2014

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The View from EUBORDERREGIONS

- Project funded by the EU's 7th Framework Programme (2011-2015)
 - www.euborderregions.eu
- Our focus: cross-border cooperation dynamics at the EU's external borders
- Our specific challenge: understanding relationships between geopolitical, economic, social and border-regime specific factors on the one hand and processes of CBC on the other
- Gathering data is a multilevel exercise that often requires improvisation

Borders: a basic question of focus

- Is it the border itself that we are interested in – for example as a line, a frontier, or borderland that has an economic-systemic life of itself and that can be empirically studied?
- Or is it rather the processes behind the making and re-making of borders and borderlands that we should be looking at: borders as indicators and reflections of socio-spatial dynamics
- In fact, we can do both. Borders become institutionalised, in fact are institutions (understood as systems, rules, norms, values, symbols) that have specific functions

The Data organisation challenge- do the data fit the questions?

- Example: what data help you assess the local impacts of CBC??
- Incompatible statistical levels of aggregation- especially at external borders
- Highly selective categories of data – often too general and/or asymmetric
- Restricted access to databases a common problem
- Informal sectors a rich but tricky source of information
- Need to compensate through “undercover” work, rough estimates
- Are border regions NUTS or networks?
- Consequence: there is no way to avoid good qualitative data – interviews, seminars, media analysis – understanding the border region not from the “god’s eye view” but from the grassroots

Consequence: we need data that help us do “deep” case studies of CBC

- Reflect basic social functions of bordering – i.e. processes of border creation, maintenance and change
- Highlight micro-level processes of border politics (exploiting borders as resources and borders as instruments of power)
- Indicate how borders are (not) resources for different groups that engage in the cross-border negotiation of interests and aspirations
- Understand why certain (economic, social, political) uses of borders succeed while others do not
- EU-funded research (EUBORDERREGIONS): borderland case studies as a means to understand potentials for spatially framed and networked CBC policies

Conclusions

- With empirical case studies we might develop an ever greater number of partial models and explanations - partial accounts of specific border-related phenomena - rather than a totalising understanding of border realities.
- How can rather disparate and contextually different border situations be related to one another?
- One strategy is to abandon the search for the big picture behind borders and social relations and instead understand what local situations say about the significance of borders and cross-border cooperation
- To achieve this we might need a new focus on qualitative data gathering that complements and supports the quantitative side

Thanks for your kind attention!